

The Amateur in You, Part 2

What have you been pondering?



How to ham in an HOA

If you live in a house or apartment that's part of an HOA (homeowner association) or CID (common interest development), you might be aware of the great benefits it can provide for your home and property, such as maintenance and management services, communal security, recreational amenities, and insurance coverage. But these come with a price, and in the interest of amateur radio, sometimes by way of antenna restrictions due to rules regarding appearance.

Before moving into an HOA-governed home, you're usually required to sign a legally binding contract, in which you agree to abide by the rules of the CC&Ds ([Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions](#)) specified in that contract. Because the agreement is binding, the HOA can legally fine you or even foreclose on your home if you violate the conditions of that agreement.

You might have found that the HOA rulebook is way too long to completely read through it before signing the agreement. As a result, you might not be aware of obscure limitations, such as the color of your mailbox, what kinds of dogs they allow, and whether antennas are permitted on your house exterior. To be sure, once you sign the agreement, you're bound by it, regardless whether any of it conflicts with another statute, even a federal one. So, you promise to abide by anything in the book regarding antennas.

Many have asked what kinds of effective antennas they can install to appease the HOA, in spite of these prohibitions. Still others wonder whether the HOA, a local body, has the legal jurisdiction to enact rules contrary to activities protected by the amateur radio service, a federal body.

If you decide to approach the HOA with your request to install an antenna, they're obligat-

ed to give you one answer, and it's likely spelled out in that rulebook, whether the representative you talk with is a friend or a ham or neither. They don't *want* to have to read you the riot act. So, one way to approach this dilemma is how many of them prefer it: 1) be reasonable about the type of antenna you want to mount and 2) just go ahead and install it anyway. Being *reasonable* typically means that your antenna should not be so large or unsightly that it disrupts the neighborhood beauty, and that it's fairly easy to install and remove if needed. So for now, no tower, no Yagi, and no hex beam.

Later, if the HOA asks you to remove your antenna, simply take it down, and all is forgiven. It typically takes more than one request or written warning before the HOA fines you for violating the agreement. Do not resist them or point out some obscure law they're unaware of, because if you fight them, you will lose. Be the good tenant and comply with their demands.

For those who would rather visit the dentist than face possible confrontation by sneaky neighbors or a suspicious HOA president, there are some compromise antenna setups that might allow you to operate on *some* bands without advertising that fact. One solution is a *flagpole antenna*, which allows you to mount your antenna on a flagpole mast, or make the mast your antenna itself. Another is the *HOA Buster*, made by connecting one side to your rain downspout and the other driven into your flower garden dirt. Yet another is running a wire, such as part of an *end-fed half-wave antenna*, across and a few inches over your roof by stand-offs. Another possibility is to install one in your attic, if it has the room, as long as your attic isn't surrounded by metal. And there are others.

